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THE

CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

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THE CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

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THE CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

BEING
STUDIES IN EPHESIANS VI. 10-18

BY
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE FOE	9
II. GOD OUR CHAMPION	14
III. OUR WRESTLING	18
IV. THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT	24
V. THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH	30
VI. THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS	36
VII. THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE	42
VIII. THE SHIELD OF FAITH	47
IX. TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION	53
X. THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD	59
XI. THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS	65
XII. PRAYER	72

EPHESIANS VI. 10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God : with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains ; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

THE CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

I

THE FOE

"Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."—EPHESIANS vi. 12.

OUR subject in these Studies is the Christian armour. You will easily see why I have chosen it. We are familiar enough with the phrase "the battle of life." We know that we have been signed with the sign of the Cross as a pledge that we "shall not be afraid to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner." But the words have lacked actuality. We have sung "Onward, Christian soldiers" with the same kind of enthusiasm with which we used to turn out to see a review of Territorials. It was a pretty sight, and we felt it was good of men to take the trouble to train. But we never regarded the performance as a danger-signal. The manœuvres were "peace manœuvres." We were only dimly conscious of the grim reality that lay behind. But now the sight of khaki means more. We are engaged in actual fighting with a foe who will destroy us if

he can. This is making a new world for us, quite different from the easy-going world that we were living in when the war came. And, if we are wise, this is opening our eyes to the reality of the spiritual conflict in which, according to St. Paul and to our baptismal service, we are all engaged.

WHAT IS MEANT BY A SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE?

Consider the nature of the conflict which is convulsing Europe. On the surface is a struggle between colossal material forces. The determining factors are guns and shells. Look deeper, Germany is mobilizing her intellectual resources against us. It is a conflict, not of brute force, but of brain, of method, and of skill. Look deeper yet. Machines will not work themselves. There remains something not yet accounted for, something in the man behind the gun which the drill-sergeant cannot put into him, though he may do a great deal to destroy it. It takes various shapes. It is seen in the power to advance in open order under heavy fire. It is seen when man is pitted against man on the land or in the air. It is seen in the power of holding on in desperate and tactically "impossible" situations. We may give it various names—"nerve," "pluck," "initiative." It is something that lies behind all these. It is "personality." It is in the sphere of personality that lies deeper than the mechanical or merely intellectual that the issue has to be decided. In the last resort, even in material warfare, the conflict is between moral, that is spiritual forces.

Go one step further. The "personalities" that are engaged are not merely individual. They are national. In the deepest sense the conflict is not between so many Englishmen and so many Germans.

The nations are at grips. The German instinct in this matter is clear-sighted. "Gott strafe England" shows that they realize the national character of the struggle.

But, if so, our foes are not without only, but within. Everything that interferes with national efficiency is on the side of our enemy. The war is slowly but surely forcing on our attention the weak points of our national character. Our slovenliness and want of thrift, our intemperance, our social selfishness, all the wrong on both sides that makes strikes in war time possible.

THE CLOSE-KNIT FORCES OF EVIL

Once more. We are fighting a nation that believes in war, and is prepared to carry its belief into practice with logical consistency, casting to the winds every kind of moral restraint, disregarding all hitherto recognized principles of humanity, treating success as the only and the sufficient justification of any form of attack. In other words, we are up against "a will to power" that acknowledges no law, a lust for domination that desires to enslave us, and will shrink from no atrocity that it regards as likely to assist in securing its object.

Now, I am not judging Germany or discussing how it has arrived at its present attitude. My point is that this "will to power" that at present possesses a mighty nation is an Evil Will. That for many is a tremendous revelation. We should have regarded it as incredible if we had not seen it. As it is, we have to find a place for it in our view of the universe.

But this is not all. We cannot comfort ourselves with the thought that the evil is altogether outside our nation or outside ourselves. It may not take

the same shape in us, but, just so far as it is weakening our power to resist, we are forced to realize that "the hosts of wickedness" form in some strange way a coherent whole, the different parts of which play into each other's hands. We are "up against" evil as a whole. If we are not prepared to fight against it, within as well as without, we must go under. St. Paul was not the fool of some worn-out superstition ; he was stating a fact, which we know now from our own experience to be true, when he said, "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

NO TRUCE IN THIS WAR

It is a serious view of life that he gives us, but it fits the facts. Evil is not the first nor the final fact in the universe. But it is here, and it is evil. God can and will make it serve a purpose of good. But that does not alter its nature, nor make it less certainly His foe that we have to cast out in His Name. And there is no truce in this war. The world is so made that it grows thorns and thistles if left to itself. Our natures deteriorate, we drift away from our ideals if we do not watch and pray.

And when we face the world, social conditions and vested interests hinder those who would do battle for the right on every side. The world is somehow out of joint, and we are dimly conscious of an Evil Power behind it all whom we must fight or go under.

Is this a gloomy view of life ? Fighters do not find it so. Fighting develops spiritual capacity. No harm can come from facing the facts, if we face them all. Our chief danger comes from ignorance. To measure the forces arrayed against you is the first step towards overcoming them. The

whole purpose of this passage in St. Paul is to teach us that we have in God resources fully equal to our need.

The forces of evil are strong and strangely coherent. We cannot meet them in our own strength or as isolated units. But we can train to take our place with all the saints in the armies of the Living God.

It is our equipment for this struggle that St. Paul brings before us in his description of the Christian Armour.

II

GOD OUR CHAMPION

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might."

EPHESIANS vi. 10.

I TRIED in our first Study to unmask the enemy against whom we are called to fight for God in the world. I began from this unattractive side, because in the spiritual as in the natural world we have been living in a fool's paradise. It was necessary, therefore, to start from the evidence that the War is forcing on our attention, that St. Paul was right in bidding us watch continually against the onslaughts of an unsleeping, cruel and deceitful foe.

St. Paul, however, does not begin or end with the devil. He starts from the magnificent faith of his nation in the righteousness of God, a faith which implies that God Himself is our Champion in the battle against every form of evil. As the prophets of Israel saw, God must Himself in the last resort step down into the arena to take His own divine share in establishing righteousness and truth both in Israel and in the world.

St. Paul is, therefore, anything but downhearted in the evil day. He knew that there was a Power at work in the world, a Power not ourselves working for unrighteousness; but, none the less, his conviction never falters that on the Throne of the Universe sits an all-sovereign Power making for righteous-

ness, Whose Will must in the end prevail over all that opposes it.

This is a mighty faith. Is there any more needful for us at the present time, or any that, in view of all that is going on before our eyes, it is so hard to keep our hold on? Is it not worth while to see if we can catch from St. Paul the fire of this faith?

THE FAITH OF ISRAEL

If we had challenged him for the ground of his assurance, he would have referred us, I think, in the first instance, to the Prophets. It was certainly deeply rooted in their teaching. We may well, then, consider first what the Prophets have to say to us. They are not easy reading. Yet the substance of their message is unmistakable, and the wonder of it grows as you dwell upon it.

For Israel was a Semitic tribe, like Moab and Ammon, and like various Arab tribes of to-day. They believed, as their neighbours did, in a God Who was their God: Who gave them their land, and went forth with their armies to battle. There was little distinctive, even in the ritual of their worship.

Yet this little insignificant tribe has outlived all the tribes, and all the mighty world-empires with which it came in contact. And the books that remain to tell us of the experiences through which they passed have a message for us, for which we look in vain to the literatures of Greece and Rome, of China, of Persia, or even of India. For in Israel, and in Israel alone, men grasped the fact that their God was righteous and loved righteousness. He was no distant inscrutable Power, Who was as dependent on them as they were on Him, and Who was, there-

fore, bound to give them victory in battle, if He could, whether they were in the right or in the wrong ; nor could He be bribed by their sacrifices or pestered by their prayers into giving them whatever they asked. They were always in His hand. He was always training them, as a father trains his son, to make them care for righteousness as He did. So, though the people were always forgetting God, and oppressing the poor, prophet after prophet came to call them back to Him, and to help them to see His hand, and understand His purpose in all the events of their national history, even though those events included defeat by their enemies, the destruction of their capital, and the scattering of the whole nation as exiles throughout the world.

One result of this teaching is before our eyes to-day. The Jews for nearly 1850 years have had no centre of national life. They have been scattered in all lands, bitterly hated, cruelly persecuted. Yet they still remain in heart one people, the prisoners of an undying hope, because they still believe and worship the God of their fathers, even though as yet they have failed to recognize Him in the crowning manifestation of His passion for righteousness.

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

But God is not the God of Israel only : He is the God of all nations, and the prophets from Amos onwards had no doubt that the triumph of righteousness for which He is working cannot be limited to Israel. " The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

How that end was to come they perceived but dimly. It was being worked out in strange and terrible ways. " Blood and fire and vapour of smoke " were

among the signs of the coming of the Day of the Lord. But they were sure that the triumph would come.

Here, for instance, is one of the vivid pictures in which they presented this truth to their countrymen. St. Paul, you will see, draws from it freely in his description of the Christian armour :

“ Judgment is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off : for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. Yea, truth is lacking ; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was none to interpose : therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him ; and his righteousness, it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head ; and he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.”—Isaiah lix. 14 ff.

THE FULFILMENT

Such was the hope both for Israel and for the world, which St. Paul had inherited from his fathers. He might not have had much to say in his younger days to vindicate it against an objector who demanded an assurance of the truth of the beautiful vision. But when his eyes were opened on the way to Damascus to see the Lord, he knew that the hopes of all the prophets that had preceded him had received a fulfilment transcending their highest expectations. For God had indeed appeared Himself in full armour to do battle for us in the person of Jesus Christ, and the symbol and instrument of His triumph over every form of evil was the Cross on Calvary.

III

OUR WRESTLING

" The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."—S. MATTHEW xi. 12.

IF GOD BE FOR US WHY HAVE WE TO FIGHT?

WE have considered together the nature of the spiritual foe with whom we have to contend in our spiritual war. We have seen that God Himself is fighting on our side. In fulfilment of the hopes, which the prophets of Israel had taught God's chosen people to cherish, God Himself came down, so Saint Paul believed, to be our Champion. " God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," and the restoration of spiritual harmony between God and man involved a direct conflict with, and a triumph over, Death, and over him that hath the power of death—that is the Devil. From this point of view it would be true to say that God " clothed Himself" with Jesus Christ to enter into the fight on man's behalf. In other words, Jesus Christ is the Panoply of God, as we shall see that He must be ours, when we go on to consider Saint Paul's description of our Armour in detail. But before we come to that consideration, there is still one preliminary question which we shall do well to examine. It is this :

How comes it, if God be for us, and if He has already in Christ overcome our enemy, that there is

any fighting left for us to do? This is, you will see, in effect the old, old question, which child after child raises as soon as it begins to think, "Why, since clearly God can if He will, does He not destroy the Devil?"

THE USE OF TEMPTATION OVERCOME

The question is not one which we can expect to be able to answer fully. It is bound up with the whole question of the existence of evil. All that we can say profitably about it is, I think, this: The possibility of evil seems at this stage of our development to be the necessary condition of a higher good than even God Himself could have given us without it. At any rate, God has chosen to make us men and not machines. Whether we go right or go wrong depends on our choosing. Every time in which a choice is put before us is a time of trial, of temptation. If we overcome the temptation by choosing and doing the right, we lift our lives to a higher level. The fight with temptation is the condition of spiritual progress. There is good coming out of it all the time.

THE USE OF ADMITTED FAILURE

Even if we are beaten by the temptation and fall, we do not fall out of God's Hand. The shock, the bitter sense of shame that He sends, may be the first step on the road that is to bring us back to Him, if we are honest with ourselves, and bravely face the fact of our responsibility.

The Devil, however, it is well to remember, will be quick enough to suggest the thought that the blame really rests upon God for allowing us to be tempted. Just as the Germans did not scruple

to throw the blame of the loss of the *Lusitania* on us. "How could they be expected," so they have contended in a public document, "to resist the temptation to commit such a crime?" We ought not to have given them the opportunity! No, the ultimate responsibility for any fall does not rest on the temptation. That is the occasion, not the cause. To use the wise words of the *Imitation of Christ*: "The temptation did not make you weak. It only showed how weak you were." It was a mirror, in which if you are wise you can see yourself, and rise on the stepping stone of your dead self to higher things. Certainly until we have some sense of our own weakness, we shall not begin to seek our help from God, and shall take but a languid interest in the Armour that He has provided for us in His Son.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF CONTINUED REBELLION

But we must go deeper yet. It is not hard to find a use for temptations that strengthen a man, because he either overcomes them, or learns a salutary lesson with regard to his own weakness from the accepted shame of defeat. But there is a third possibility. What if the man hardens his heart and strengthens himself in his wickedness and goes on adding sin to sin? What can we say of God's relation to a man who reacts in that way to temptation? Dark as the problem is, we know enough to say at least this. God will not interfere to change a man's attitude towards Himself by force. He will never turn a man into a machine. Cost what it may of widespread misery and degradation—and, as the Cross shows, it costs God more, far more, than it costs man—the sinner must lie on the bed that he

has made, the prey of the worm that dieth not, in the fire that is not quenched, until by an act of his own will he turns from his sin and begins to fear God. What that implies we need not go far to see.

EUROPE IN HELL, AND THE WAY OUT

The state of Europe at this moment is awful. Only one word can describe it. It is Hell: a hell not of individual souls but of nations. The direct and immediate fruit of the doctrine, which we have all been secretly cherishing in our hearts, though only one nation has dared to formulate it openly, and carry it out to its logical conclusion. The doctrine, I mean, that the will of a nation knows no law; that it has no call to recognize God in all its ways. It is the inevitable retribution for our corporate sin. And from this hell there can be no escape, until as nations we are prepared to turn and fear God: a consummation which seems very far off, but for which, so far as it concerns our own nation, we can all as Englishmen and as Christians begin at once to work and pray. God grant that the National Mission of Repentance and Hope may prove the instrument in God's Hands of our deliverance.

NO VICTORY WITHOUT A FIGHT

Does this seem a digression? Has the question we have been considering in this paper carried us away from the subject of the Christian Armour and the duty that rests upon us to put that armour on? Surely not. It has only pointed the moral of the bitter lesson that God is teaching us by these long months of war. He has come down to fight for us. He has put within our reach, in His Son, power amply

sufficient for our needs. But He will not deprive us of the privilege of taking a real share with Him in the Victory. We must each, whether as nations or as individuals, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, just because it is God Who is quickening in us both the will to devote ourselves to His service, and the power to make that will effectual.

Does the moral need an illustration to bring it more directly home? Here is a well-known scene from the *Pilgrim's Progress*:

WHAT CHRISTIAN SAW IN THE HOUSE OF THE INTERPRETER

I saw also, that the *Interpreter* took him again by the hand, and led him into a beautiful place, where was builded a stately Palace, beautiful to behold; at the sight of which *Christian* was greatly delighted; he saw also upon the top thereof certain persons walking, who were clothed all in Gold.

Then, said *Christian*, May we go in thither?

Then the *Interpreter* took him and led him up toward the Door of the Palace; and behold, at the Door stood a great Company of men, as desirous to go in, but durst not. There also sat a man at a little distance from the door, at a table side, with a book, and his inkhorn before him, to take the name of him that should enter therein: He saw also, that in the doorway stood many men in armour to keep it, being resolved to do to the men that would enter, what hurt and mischief They could. Now was *Christian* somewhat in a maze: At last, when every man started back for fear of the armed men, *Christian* saw a man of a very stout countenance come up to the man that sat there to write, saying, *Set down my name, Sir*; the which when he had done, he saw the

man draw his Sword, and put an Helmet upon his head, and rush toward the Door upon the armed men, who laid upon him with deadly force ; But the man, not at all discouraged, fell to cutting and hacking most fiercely. So after he had received and given many wounds to those that attempted to keep him out, he cut his way through them all, and pressed forward into the Palace ; at which there was a pleasant voice heard from those that walked upon the top of the Palace, saying,

Come in, Come in,
Eternal Glory thou shalt win.

So he went in, and was clothed with such garments as they. Then *Christian* smiled, and said, I think verily I know the meaning of this.

“ The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

IV

THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT

“ The night is far spent, the day is at hand : let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”—ROMANS xiii. 12.

WE have seen that we are called to take our part in a world-wide war. Whatever form the fight may take, whether with machine-guns, bombs, and hand-grenades in the trenches, or with patient, watchful, resolute self-discipline in the citadel of our inner life, the fight is spiritual, that is personal. It is the man behind the gun that counts in the trenches. It is the man in us, “ the inner man,” that counts in the battle with temptation. The Armour, therefore, that we need for the battle of life must in like manner be spiritual. In one word, it is character.

THE EFFECT OF CHARACTER

We have not far to look for an illustration of this fact. Watch what happens when a body of young men, like the freshmen at a University, have to face life for themselves for the first time, or when, as in war time, men of all ages find themselves confronted by new situations. Old habits are suddenly broken off, old companions left behind. Everyone has to face new work with a new set of associates and new temptations.

At first everyone is at sea. But soon the mass begins to sort itself. Differences of brain power show themselves. Some are quicker than others in picking up a new job, or a new subject of study. They master it, and see how to apply its principles for themselves. Others feel lost and dazed, and always want someone to tell them what to do.

Again, some stand out as leaders. Their companions wait to know what line they will take, before doing anything themselves. Others stand outside the stream, and go their own way regardless of what the rest of the world is saying or doing. These differences are not in the brain, but in will power. And strength of brain and strength of will do not always go together. A man may be clever, yet always take his tone from the company in which he finds himself. He may describe himself justly as a man whom it is no use trying to drive, and really be an ass.

There is yet another direction in which, sooner or later, differences appear. Some keep straight all the time. Their faces are set in the right direction. They come out of the trial better men than they went in ; perhaps with a poorer opinion of themselves ; certainly, if they have made mistakes and learnt to correct them, with wider sympathies and greater power to help others. Others in various degrees go wrong. They are unmistakably worse at the end of the trial than they were at the beginning.

Here again the line of cleavage cuts clean across the lines we have already noticed. There are clever men and strong men on both sides of it, as well as men naturally dull and insignificant. The determining factor in this, the ultimately decisive direction, is not strength of brain or strength of will, it is moral strength. The armour of light that a man

needs if he is to overcome in the battle of life is Character.

CONSCIENCE THE SECRET OF CHARACTER

What, then, is the secret of character? On one side it is quite simple. Our last Study has put it into our hands. No man can win through this fight whose face is not set in the right direction. It is not enough to wish no harm to anyone. It is rare to find a man deliberately choosing evil. No man can keep straight, unless he forms and resolutely maintains the habit of asking himself before he comes to any decision, not Is this the easiest or most popular thing to do, or the thing that will bring me most pleasure or profit? but Is this my duty? The world is possessed by a will to pleasure or a will to power. We can only escape being enslaved to it by resolutely devoting ourselves to the will to right.

This, notice, is what St. Paul teaches in our text. He is calling the Christians of his own day "to give up making provision for the flesh," to give up, that is, living for their own pleasure, and to live instead in the realized presence of God, Who, as he and they believed, would in their generation make a public manifestation of His salvation. To do that was "to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light," or, as he expresses the same thought in the closing words of the passage, "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ." And his words have a present application. If men were living then in a time when God was going by most startling judgments to waken them out of sleep and force them to reap the fruit of their forgetfulness of Him, we who have had eighteen centuries of practice in reading the signs of His appearing, should need no elaborate

argument to convince us that "our salvation is nearer to us to-day than when we first believed."

OBEY YOUR CONSCIENCE

If so, there are three points to which we shall do well to give heed. First this: The way to arm yourself for the fight is to obey your conscience. To follow the guidance of the light that lighteth every man is in itself an equipment for battle.

I have not hitherto, you may have noticed, made any division between those who call themselves Christians and those who do not, partly because it is still a fair presumption that most Englishmen have been baptized and would class themselves as Christians; but not altogether. The fundamental distinction is where I put it, between those who accept the law of duty, and those who are in fact out to please themselves. And this line of cleavage cuts across the distinction between those who do and those who do not profess to be Christians. Many say "Lord, Lord" with great fervour who will yet be found outside the kingdom, because they have been doing their own will, and not the will of their Father in heaven. Many, on the other hand, who do not yet know the Lord, have the root of the matter in them. For they follow the light that lighteth every man, and that light, whether a man knows it or not, is Christ.

We, who profess and call ourselves Christians, will do well to lay this fact to heart. To face it resolutely is the first sign that we are awaking from our slumber, and are at least not afraid to come to the light, that it may show us what evil we must put away before we can don our armour.

YOU CAN, IF YOU WILL

My second point is this: No one can excuse himself from undertaking this task by saying that he is too stupid or too weak. The line of cleavage between those who set their faces to do right and those who do not, runs, as we have seen, right across the distinctions between the bright and the dull, the commanding and the insignificant. A clever man may be a rogue. A strong man may set himself to do evil "with both hands earnestly," while a man who knows himself to be a fool and a weakling may set himself to do right. He is what God made him, and God will help him to make the best of himself. It is surprising what quiet strength and wisdom such a man develops in God's Hands. God often chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak and contemptible to abase the strong.

CHRIST CAN MAKE A MAN OF YOU

My last point is this: As the light is Christ, so is the Armour. The will to good, with which we identify ourselves when we choose the good, is a real will. The power not ourselves making for righteousness, both in this world without and in our hearts within, has been manifested in Jesus Christ. He is only waiting for our consenting will to possess us wholly. In the light of that thought we grasp what is meant by the fact that in our baptism we put on Christ, and that in Holy Communion we feed on the Body with which He was clothed, that He might do His Father's will. Faith in Christ has in it the secret of character. If you are a Christian, you can hope to be a man.

It was said of Frederic Denison Maurice, " He always impressed me as a man who was naturally weak in his will ; but an iron will seemed to work through him."

O living will that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock ;
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure.

V

THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH

“ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.”
EPHESIANS vi. 14.

WE have seen that the uniform of the Christian soldier, the equipment that he needs for his spiritual warfare, is a specific personal character, the character of Jesus Christ our Lord. To put on this uniform is a very different thing from putting on a suit of clothes, which is never part of our true selves, and can be changed whenever we are so disposed. It involves a spiritual transformation which Christ Himself works in a man who is prepared humbly to abide in Him. It is the result of an habitual surrender to the guidance of His Spirit, a resolute determination to make His will the law of our life.

If we have that point clear, we can go on to consider the different parts of the Christian armour which St. Paul brings before us. Each calls attention to an element in the character of Jesus which enabled Him to overcome, and which will show us what He will develop in us, if we keep close to Him.

It is not altogether an easy task. St. Paul’s picture is drawn from the dress and armour of a Roman soldier. As he writes he is chained to one, and those to whom he was writing were accustomed to the sight of Roman troops, and so had no difficulty in grasping the earthly side of his parable. We, however, shall

have to make a distinct effort in each case to realize the figure before we begin to examine into its interpretation.

THE USE OF A GIRDLE

This task is at its simplest in regard to the girdle with which St. Paul's description commences. The girdle was not, strictly speaking, armour at all. It was part of ordinary dress. Men do not, even now, in the East wear close-fitting clothes as we do. The outer garment is loose and full like a surplice. If a man has to do any strenuous work he has to tie up his robe with a girdle. The difference between a man in the market-place in Jerusalem to-day looking out for a job and a man on a holiday is marked by the fact that the one appears in public with his loins girded and the other does not. Girding therefore represents the condition of energetic action. The girdle is the secret of efficiency.

THE CHRISTIAN IS OUT FOR WORK

The soldier clearly has no choice but to be girded. He is out for work, not for a holiday. His will must be braced, his mind "on the spot." It is well that the Christian soldier should be reminded of this obvious fact. It is so easy in quiet times to drift and saunter through life. Even as citizens it is good now and then to have to fill in a registration form. It forces us to ask ourselves in a national crisis precisely what we can do to help. What if we should be summoned as Churchmen to say precisely what we are prepared to do to help the nation in its spiritual campaign?

But St. Paul does not tell us merely to gird ourselves for action. He tells us that the girdle that we need is truth. Is he right? Is truthfulness the secret of efficient action?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Before we can answer this question we must reflect a little on the nature of truth.

In its simplest aspect truth may be regarded as "correspondence with fact." The first thing we have to do, if we wish to test the truth of any theory that is put before us to explain any natural phenomenon or any part of our experience, is to see whether it fits the facts. A man speaks the truth, so far as he has apprehended it, when he not only means what he says, but says what he means. Speaking the truth requires, that is, not only an honest intention, but the power of finding language to fit the thought that it is desired to express.

Again, a man thinks truly on any subject in proportion as the theory he forms, or the explanation he accepts, fits not his preconceived opinions or his interest at the moment, but the thing itself that he is thinking about. Can we not go, then, a step further? If correspondence with fact is the test of a true word and of a true thought, do we want any other test to show us what we mean when we speak of a true man?

It is one side, but only one side, of the case to say that a true man must not be a hypocrite. His life must correspond to his profession. A man might quite honestly say "I do not profess to be anything but a rascal," and the statement might correspond to the fact, but that would not make him a true man. In the end we shall find that no man can be a true man, through and through, no man can be really himself, until his life corresponds not to his own or other people's, but to God's idea of him, until, that is, he thinks and feels and speaks and acts continually

in accordance with God's will, or, in other words, until he has become what God meant him to be when He created and redeemed him. When he attains that goal, and not before, will he be compassed about with reality, or, to use St. Paul's language, be perfectly "girded with truth."

TRUTH THE SECRET OF EFFICIENCY

This goal may well seem far off. But even the humblest effort to attain it contains in itself (as St. Paul bids us expect) the secret of efficient action. Look for a moment at the consequences that follow from the lack of it. See how a man hampers himself when he has committed himself to a single lie. Even the possession of an honest secret is a serious clog. And the man who is consciously acting a part, whose one object is to pretend to be what he is not, can never throw himself whole-heartedly into anything. Half his energies have to be spent in preventing his true self from coming out. He can never give his undivided attention to anything. He has always to consider whether what he is saying or doing fits his assumed character. The one thing that is vital to him is the look of the thing. The one thing barred is to be himself. It is easy, therefore, to see how the lack of inner truthfulness must destroy efficiency.

Nor is it hard to see that St. Paul's theory fits the facts positively. Hans Andersen has an instructive fable to show how a child who can see things as they are, and call them by their right names, may put its elders to shame, when their eyes have become blind to anything but their own conventions.

Again, a man or woman does not need extraordinary gifts of mind or body to be a great power. We admire such gifts coldly, perhaps somewhat ner-

uously. We cannot be sure what use is going to be made of them. But anyone of whose sincerity we have no doubt, who has no axe of his own to grind, for himself or for his party, who is full of the object he has before him and is not thinking of himself at all, can always command our respect ; and, if his object is the Christian object of losing himself in the service of others, there is no limit to the influence he can exert and the devotion he can arouse. There is nothing so winning as simple sincerity, whole-hearted, unselfish devotion.

HOW CAN WE BECOME TRUE MEN ?

Such inner truthfulness is, however, hard to attain. Conscious hypocrisy is rare and transitory. The man who tolerates any falsehood in himself very soon comes to believe his own lie. But we can drift into unreality without deliberate intention. It is long before we realize that a man cannot escape falling into the pit of falsehood unless he sets himself with his whole heart to be true.

It is so easy to go on halting between two opinions : to think that we can " walk in the flesh," that is " go our own way and please ourselves " one minute, and " walk in the spirit," putting the claims of duty first the next. It is so hard to realize how exacting the claims of the truth are, that it must cost a man all that he has, that he must give up any pretence of being his own master, and take Christ as his Master out and out, if he is ever to be a true man, the man that God meant and means him to be.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Yet so it is. There are two, and only two ways, by which a man may set himself to be true. One is

expressed in the advice of Polonius to Laertes when he is sending him out to see the world—

This above all,—To thine own self be true ;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

This in the sense in which the man of the world uses the words “ to thine own self be true ” is nothing but a specious lie. The man who deliberately makes himself his own object, who may be trusted, as we say, always to look after No. 1, is not a person who in case of conflicting interests can be trusted to be true to any man. We know this well enough. We are always on our guard in dealing with such a man. And we expect other people to be on their guard in dealing with us. We call that “ business.” It needs no argument to show that that is not the way to make true men.

CHRIST IS THE WAY BECAUSE CHRIST IS THE TRUTH

If the world’s way contents you not, and you long in your heart of hearts to be true, you can try St. Paul’s way. You can “ put on Christ.” He came on earth to bear witness to the truth, and He died because He claimed to be the whole world’s king (St. John xviii. 36). If you humbly give yourself to Him, and ask Him to help you to make your life fit that fact, He will make you in the end both a man whom his fellows can trust, and also a true man in the deeper sense that, as we saw, belongs to the words, “ the man that God meant and means you to be.” Christ is the Way because Christ is the Truth, and each man finds his true self only when he gets into his right relation to Him as King.

VI

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Having put on the breastplate of Righteousness.”

EPHESIANS vi. 14.

THE breastplate of a Roman soldier, as contrasted with his girdle, was very much in evidence. It was a coat of mail which protected his body before and behind, and enabled him to face without flinching dangers which might otherwise prove fatal. If the girdle represents the condition of effective action, the breastplate will represent the secret of a stout heart and good courage. In the Christian armour the breastplate, St. Paul tells us, is righteousness.

WHAT, THEN, IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

On the side of our duty to man we may define it as “the fulfilment of all our human relationships,” “rendering to every man his due.” On the divine side it means “being at peace with God,” delighting without let or hindrance in the joy of His countenance. A man whose conscience is void of offence towards God and man has put on and is wearing the breastplate of righteousness—such a man has the secret of courage. As the wise man tells us (Prov. xxviii. 1): “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the

righteous are bold as a lion." Conscience makes cowards or heroes of us all.

So far all is plain. Righteousness is a breastplate. Nothing seems simpler than to keep your conscience clear, and so to wear at last this part of your armour night and day. The way to heaven is quite plain. "Take the first turn to the right and keep straight on." Only in practice there are two formidable obstacles, one springing from the past, the other from the present.

THE DIFFICULTY FROM THE PAST

You can study this in the account of Christian's fight with Apollyon, or of Sir Percivale's experience in his quest of the Holy Grail, when

Every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did
Awoke and cried : " This quest is not for thee."

The difficulty from the past is that our consciences are not clean to start with.

THE DIFFICULTY FROM THE PRESENT

Again, as St. Paul found (Rom. vii.) when he set himself to do the will of God, it is one thing to know the will and honestly to delight in it " after the inner man," but quite another thing to do it. Our wills are enslaved by sin. Again and again we fail to do what we delight in, and do what we loathe.

How, then, can we, oppressed with the guilt and power of sin, buckle on the breastplate of righteousness ?

THE DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION

Everything depends on the progress we are making in our task of girding ourselves with truth. If we are striving so to put on Christ that we may become true men, if we are setting ourselves with all our hearts to follow Him, because He is our King and we can only find our true place in the world as we look up to Him as Lord, then we shall be learning in the most effective of all schools the depth of our need of His righteousness and the reality of His power to supply that need.

It is no more obvious that we cannot do our duty without His help than that we have to live looking to Him if we are to be made and kept true. It is quite possible to be on the best of terms with ourselves, to say there is nothing between me and God, "I have fellowship with Him," while all the time we are "walking in darkness," pleasing ourselves, not doing His will. If we make such a claim, St. John warns us (1 John i. 6) that we lie. It is a clear proof that we are not trying to be true.

The fact is that self-deception is extraordinarily easy. We start with an excellent opinion of ourselves. Our intentions are so good. We scorn to measure them against our performances. We excuse ourselves for any failures that disturb our self-content by throwing the blame on human nature as a whole. "It is not in flesh and blood," we say, "to resist such a temptation." And so we shut our eyes to the fact that we still love our sin, and have no intention of giving it up.

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

It is only when we deliberately set our faces to the light, and determine that, cost what it may, we will

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS 39

be true, that we grow conscious of the reality of the chains by which we are bound. But, thank God, as soon as we begin to do that, our deliverance is at hand. "If we say that we have no sin"—that we are not, when left to ourselves, under its power—"we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," but when we become conscious of our sins, and bring them to God, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That is what He is God for, to set us free. His name is "the Lord our righteousness." Joseph was told to call the child's name Jesus, "because He shall save His people from their sins." And He did that once for all when He died on the Cross.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

How the Cross has this power is an unfathomable mystery. It is enough to know in living experience that the power is there. When Christian at last came face to face with the Cross, the load that was on his back slipped off and rolled away, until it disappeared in an open grave.

When the Prodigal comes to himself, and sets his face steadfastly to return to his Father, while he is yet a long way off his Father meets him and falls on his neck and kisses him. And the meeting-place of the Father and His lost son is the Cross. Perfect love has found a way for our deliverance, and it is enough for the present to know that it is this.

THE ROBE OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

God desireth not the death of a sinner, though as long as he cleaves to his sin the sinner must abide in death. And, as soon as we turn from our sins, God

sees in us, not the evil that has been and still is, but the good that shall one day be, the good of which Christ is our surety and pledge. So from the moment that we set our face homewards, God sees us no longer as we are in ourselves, nor the disgrace and degradation into which we have drifted. He sees us "in Christ." To use language which in many ears to-day sounds fanciful, but which corresponds to a Divine reality, the robe of Christ's righteousness is cast about us, and we can abide without fear in the very presence of God, in the power of the blood that has been shed for the remission of our sins.

HOW CAN WE PUT IT ON?

It is an inscrutable mystery. Only experience can teach us that it is at the same time the divinest and most potent of facts. And that experience, we shall do well to remember, may or may not be accompanied by an emotional storm, a violent crisis of conversion. The vital thing is that it issues in a settled habit of will.

No make-believe, no merely imputed righteousness can satisfy either the holiness of God or our need. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness, as no temporary expedient, no mere mask to cover tolerated, ineradicable defilement. It is put on us to transform us from within after its likeness, and it has in it the promise and the potency of perfect triumph over every sin.

Our whole work through life, as God reveals to us the presence of one enemy after another lurking within, is to bring the power of Christ's righteousness to bear on their extermination ; and so little by little to die to sin, and buckle tighter the breastplate, which is ours not in ourselves, but in Him, as we

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS 41

go forward with a stout heart and a good courage to face the foes, both in our own hearts and in the world about us, against which we are pledged to fight.

VII

THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

“Having . . . your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace.”—EPHESIANS vi. 15.

THE third element in the soldier’s equipment that comes up for consideration is the military boot. No one can question the importance of adequate protection for the feet for a man on active service to ensure a firm stance in hand to hand fighting, and above all on the march.

St. Paul’s phrase may be understood in two ways. “The preparation of the Gospel of Peace” may mean either “the preparedness,” “the readiness for action” which comes from the Gospel of Peace, “the alertness,” that is, “which is imparted to the Christian by the glad tidings he has received and which he is charged to proclaim”: or it may mean, “the work of preparing the way for the Gospel of Peace,” following the line of thought suggested by Isaiah’s words, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of them that bring us the Gospel of Peace,” and the voice that he hears crying, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” If we adopt this second interpretation, the thought suggested by the phrase as a whole would be that the work of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord into the hearts of men is in itself a protection for the feet of the man who is

engaged upon it. It is worth while dwelling on this thought. It is not obvious, but it is important, and the Bible is full of it.

SAFE WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Look, for instance, at St. John xi. 9. Jesus has received an urgent summons from the sisters of Lazarus and is starting to visit them. His disciples are aghast. But Jesus will not be turned aside from following a clear call of duty by any lion that the fears of his friends could conjure into the path: "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him." It is as if He said: "If not a sparrow can fall to the ground without My Father, how much more must it be true of His children that we are each immortal till our work is done." And meanwhile the light of duty is a sure guide, the only one we have. He knew the power of the promise (Psalm xci.): "He will give his angels charge over thee. They will bear thee in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." He lived in the spirit of Psalm xxv. 14: "Mine eyes are ever looking unto the Lord, for he shall pluck my feet out of the net."

Similarly, St. John writes (1 John ii. 10): "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." A man who lives unselfishly will harm neither himself nor others. The safest place for any man is the place where God would have him be. Even if death finds him there it cannot hurt him.

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE MUST SPREAD

St. Paul, however, is thinking more of the work of the Christian than of the dangers that beset his path. The truth committed to us is not for ourselves alone. It is for the world—we cannot enjoy it in isolation. Our own hold on the Gospel depends directly on our faithfulness to the trust it brings. As F. D. Maurice said :

“ Forgiveness is not forgiveness when it is turned to our own ease and comfort. It is in its nature expansive, diffusive ; it cannot be cooped up in the heart of any creature : it must go forth into the open air, or it dies. God’s forgiveness, free, large, absolute as it is, only reaches a man’s heart when it subdues his unbrotherly nature, and makes him forgiving. The debts, we know it well, cannot loose their penal hold on the conscience, their present and future terror, till love comes in to fulfil them and transfer them ; till a man learns to say I am a debtor to Jew and Greek, to bond and free.”

**CHRISTIANS EXIST TO MAKE OTHERS
CHRISTIANS**

Our text, in fact, brings us up against a fundamental law of spiritual life which, if true at all, is true universally ; though English Churchmen are in great danger from their natural reserve of forgetting it, and losing in consequence their own sense of the power of the Gospel.

We are indeed gradually realizing the claim upon us of Foreign Missionary work. We are beginning to understand that no one can be a true Christian who is not at heart a missionary. The interests of a citizen of the Kingdom of God cannot be less than world-

wide. It is as monstrous to send our men and women to give their lives to witnessing for Christ in the uttermost parts of the earth, and then to forget all about them, as it would be to forget the men who are fighting for us in Flanders or in Mesopotamia. But strangely enough it is easier to work and pray for the conversion of China than to accept our share of responsibility for the conversion of our own immediate friends and acquaintances.

It is, of course, difficult and delicate work. But no one who is beginning, however dimly, to know the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in his own life can escape the duty of undertaking it. Each of us to the utmost of his capacity is his brother's keeper: "If thy brother sin," our Lord said, "go shew him his fault between thee and him alone"; "If a man," says St. John, "see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he will ask and God will give him life for those that sin not unto death."

No doubt the C.E.M.S. reminds us that all Churchmen should be engaged in Church work. But there is a danger of failing to realize our privilege and our responsibility just at the point where it costs most and is most fruitful. Laymen take refuge in "serving tables." They undertake finance and organization, leaving directly spiritual and personal work to the Clergy. "It's the parson's job." Yes, but it is the layman's job too. And we shall not have recovered the true ideal of Church life until we have realized that Church work in the world is distinctively spiritual work. Every member of the body is a spiritual person with his part to play in working out the redemption of the world. The Clergy, no doubt, are the officers in the Army of God. They have for too long been regarded as the whole. A blessed necessity is teaching us the value of our private

soldiers. And for efficiency in Christian warfare, the feet of every one of them must be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace.

THE SOURCE OF ZEAL AND DIRECTION

Do we ask once more "How can this be done?", this time with a clearer consciousness that the task is beyond our power? How can such poor Christians as we know ourselves to be, help anyone else to come to Christ?

It is not enough to tell us that our own faith will become weaker and weaker unless we share it with others. That is why it has such little power either in our own lives or on the world. But we really feel helpless in the matter and do not even know how to begin to try.

What then? If in spite of our weakness and perplexity we feel that we cannot be true to Christ unless we make the effort, the same power that enables us to put on the girdle of Truth and the breastplate of Righteousness will give us also the zeal for the spread of the Gospel that we need for the protection of our feet. We can go back to the Cross of Christ and warm our cold hearts at the fire of His love. We can lay our need before Him and really expect an answer. The sense of our need and of His willingness to help is the secret of prayer. And we shall find that He will show us what He would have us do, and will when necessary put into our mouths the words that He would have us speak for Him.

VIII

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

“ Withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.”

EPHESIANS vi. 16 (R.V.).

WE pass at this point from articles of clothing to weapons of war, from personal qualities, which we have to acquire by continuous self-discipline, to resources in God, which we have to grasp and wield in hours of special peril. It is a welcome change; for in considering personal qualities we have to think of ourselves, and that is depressing. But the weapons of our spiritual warfare are all needed for immediate action: and, as they are all to be found in God alone, the effort to lay hold of any of them links us afresh to Him. Here, for instance, God Himself is our shield. “ The Name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous fleeth into it and is safe ” (Prov. xviii. 10).

“ But,” you may object, “ St. Paul calls ‘ faith ’ not ‘ God ’ our shield. Is not ‘ Faith ’ an intensely personal quality ? ” Yes, but “ faith ” has two distinct meanings.

It stands for the creed I believe in, as well as for the hold I have on it. And St. Paul is here bidding us remember Him in Whom we believe. He is turning our thoughts away from ourselves to One Who remains true, however much our words and feelings may change.

IS OUR CREED A FOSSIL?

It will sound strange to many to-day to hear the Creed spoken of as a shield. The twentieth century regards Creeds at best as interesting fossils : mighty forces once, but quite dead now. If you are inclined to think like that, turn to the Apostles' Creed and look it fairly in the face. "I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord . . . and in the Holy Ghost." It is nothing more, and it is nothing less than a declaration of faith in the threefold name of God into which we were baptized with such simple expansion (1) with reference to the creation of the world, (2) to the birth and death, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and (3) to distinctive elements in Christian spiritual experience, as the use of centuries has shown to be helpful in declaring the character of Him Who bears the name, and in indicating directions in which the revelation that He has given us of Himself has power to mould our lives.

Of course if there is no reality corresponding to the name, if God is no longer alive, then the Creed is a fossil. It has no longer any meaning for us, whatever power it may have once had. But if God is not dead, our attitude towards the Creed only shows that we leave Him out of our calculations, and are trying to live without Him. However high the shield may hang as a trophy on our walls, and however indignant we may be with anyone who threatens to disturb it, we have never made it our own, and put it to the proof in the battle of life.

THE CREED IN THE LIFE OF GENERAL GORDON

And yet, when now and then a man arises who believes the Creed and builds his life on the truth of it, what a revelation it is of the power that is stored up in the familiar words. Here are three short extracts from the life of General Gordon.*

The first relates to an occasion when with only ten men he entered Walad-el-Michael's camp of 7000 armed warriors, and was made a prisoner. It is part of a letter explaining how he came to expose himself to the peril :

“ I do try and think, and try to put in practice, that God is the Supreme Power in the world, and that He is Almighty. And though ‘ use your judgment ’ people may say ‘ You tempt your God ’ in putting yourself in positions like my present one, yet I do *not* do it to tempt Him. I do it because I wish to trust in His promises, and I feel sure, however trying it may be (and it is trying to me in a great degree), that I gain in strength and faith by it. If He wills me to fail, so be it.”

On another occasion he writes :

“ I have really no troops with me, but I have the *Shekinah* and I do like trusting to Him, and not to *men*. Remember, unless He gave me confidence and encouraged me to trust Him, I could not have it ; and so I have the earnest of success in this confidence.” (Cf. Phil. 1. 28.)

Once more. Defied by 6000 Turks and Bashi-Bazouks, who would not carry out his orders to stop slave-caravans, he resolved to disband them, and comments thus on his determination :

* *Charles George Gordon*, a sketch by R. H. Barnes and C. E. Brown. Macmillan, 1885, pp. 61-3.

" Let me ask who that had not the Almighty with him could do that ? I have the Almighty with me, and I will do it. Consider the effect of harsh measures among an essentially *Mussulman* population, carried out brusquely by a *Nazarene* ; measures which touch the pocket of everyone."

There is the Creed in action. There is the use that a master in the art of spiritual fence can make of the Shield of Faith.

WHY SHOULD THE CREED MEAN LESS TO US THAN TO HIM ?

" But," you may say, " that is all very well for a hero like Gordon. I cannot be expected to reach his standard." " Why not ? " " Because we have not such childlike, whole-hearted faith in God." Again we must ask " Why not ? Have we another Creed than he ? Is not our God Almighty ? "

The root of Gordon's faith was not in himself. It was the response of his whole being to the revelation contained in the Name of God. Do let us lay hold of that fact. It is full of hope for the faintest-hearted among us. The power of the Creed in the life of Gordon was due to two things, the truth outside and the faith within. And the faith, as he himself tells us, grew as he put the truth of his Creed to proof.

FAITH A RESPONSE TO THE REVELATION OF GOD

The same Creed means little to us because of our little faith. How can we increase it ? First by remembering that faith within is a response to the Truth without. Once see that God is true and our whole hearts go out to Him. The kind of God that men deny is not the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, but some distorted image that has slipped into His place.

And here is the wonder. In the spiritual world, as in the natural, the light creates the eye by which we see it. Just as we have eyes because there is a sun, so the light proceeding from God not only reveals the object of our faith, it creates the very faculty of faith itself. If, then, we would grow in faith, we must go back to the Creed. We must go, not to General Gordon, but to Jesus Christ. We must see for ourselves the God in Whom He believed, the Father Whom He came to reveal.

There is the answer to all the cruel doubts and suspicions of His perfect love, which are "the fiery darts of the Evil One," the lies which, ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has used to loosen our hold on our God. "He that spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all," cannot be keeping anything from us out of mere envy or spite. He has earned the right to be trusted even in the dark. So the Creed is a Shield. It has the power to create and guard our faith in God. We take it up by meditating on it until it comes to life and takes hold of us.

FAITH GROWS BY OBEDIENCE TO TRUTH

But a man may say "I must be honest. I must not profess to believe more than I do. And there are difficulties of all kinds in the way of faith in the revelation of God in Christ. What help is there for me?"

Here is what helped Horace Bushnell when he awoke with a start to the fact that he had drifted out of touch with God. He found on examination that there was one thing which he did believe, the Eternal

difference between right and wrong. But he discovered at the same time that that belief was making no difference in his life. So he prayed in the darkness for help in throwing out his whole life in obedience to the one truth that had been given him to see, and, as he prayed, his rudimentary Creed came to life. His God became a living God to him, his shield and exceeding great reward.

IX

TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION

“Take the Helmet of Salvation.”—EPHESIANS vi. 17.

THE HELMET IS MORE THAN A PROTECTION FOR THE HEAD

IT is not easy to grasp the full use of a helmet. No doubt it protects the head. But you cannot look at pictures of Greek warriors, or at the full dress uniform of a regiment of the Guards, without feeling that it was meant for more than simple protection. The busby was meant to make the men look bigger than they are, and so to strike terror into their opponents.

There is a beautiful scene in Homer's Iliad (Bk. vi. 543 ff.), which may help us to realize how much the terror inspired by the sight of a man in armour was connected with the helmet. Hector is saying good-bye to his wife and his baby boy before going out to fight, and stretched out his arms to take his child. But the little one is terrified at the sight of his father, as kindred associations might lead us to say, “in his war paint.” So he has to take off his helmet to stop the crying.

We may expect, then, to find the helmet of the Christian warrior of use in attack as well as in defence, and St. Paul's language implies no less. For there are two words in Greek for “Salvation,” one describing “the state of salvation,” the other “the force that brings salvation,” and it is the second that St. Paul

uses here. He does indeed use the first in 1 Thess. v. 8. But even there he transforms it. The helmet, there as here, is not the fruit of victory, the achieved "state of salvation," but "the hope" of it, the bright, confident anticipation of the triumph in store.

OUR HELMET IS THE POWER OF GOD THAT BRINGS SALVATION

The difference between these two kinds of "salvation" has considerable practical importance for our thoughts with regard to our helmet. The "state of salvation" suggests something which we receive from God as a present possession, a comfortable assurance of our own personal safety, enabling us to contemplate the forces arrayed against us without dismay, save that, come what may, God will bring us safely through. An assurance of this kind, grounded deep in a conscience at peace with God and man, has great value. But it may lead to presumption and to sloth, if a man tries to persuade himself that he has it because he believes that he ought to have it, and not because he has fulfilled the conditions that produce it. And a hold on it has nothing like the fighting value of a hold on the kind of salvation that St. Paul is speaking of. That is nothing less than the might of God Himself bringing salvation. It is what Simeon thanked God for in the infant Jesus when he sang, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He had not seen the victory itself, but he recognized in the Babe that he held in his arms the Divine Power by which the victory would be won. To don the helmet of that salvation, a man must not seek in the first instance to be filled with an assurance of his own salvation: he must fix his gaze on the assured triumph of the cause of God throughout the world. A man who has surrendered

himself to be an instrument in the Hands of the Power that is bringing about that triumph will go forth "conquering and meaning to conquer" in that part of the fighting which has been appointed for him.

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ON OUR SIDE

Let us dwell on this thought. We lose enormously in effectiveness by our neglect of it. But it is hard to turn to practical account the truth, which we considered in our second study, that God Himself is our Champion. Good and evil are so inextricably intertwined in the conflicts to which we find ourselves committed, that if right, and right only, is to prevail, God must be engaged on both sides, if He is engaged on either. And very few are so whole-heartedly on God's side that they can welcome the frustration of any plan of their own that would interfere with the perfect triumph of His Will.

AS IT IS HARD TO PRAY FOR VICTORY IN THE WAR

Think, for example, of the European War. We are fighting in a cause which we are fully convinced is just. Vast issues vital to human welfare: not merely our Empire, but the freedom of our own and of every other nation in Europe, are perilled on the issue. Yet not a few shrink from praying openly and without reserve for victory. They are afraid of seeming to claim that we, as a nation, apart from the justice of our cause, are more righteous than our enemies. They are conscious of our many national sins, and of "the stupor of self-satisfaction and complacency" in which we are steeped. Above all, they

feel so acutely the hideous brutality of war that they cannot think of God as taking part on either side.

Yet the conviction that a man is called to champion a righteous cause is very different from self-righteousness. Instead of filling a man with high thoughts of himself, the feeling that the success of a cause, which he believes to be the cause of God, depends on him must, if it is seriously entertained, fill him as nothing else can with a sense of his own unworthiness.

War, again, has no place in the perfected kingdom of God, any more than a policeman, or a law court, or a prison. We have an express promise that the time will come when men shall not learn war any more. But that time is not yet, and the Sermon on the Mount gives us no reason to hope that that consummation will be reached "until all be accomplished."

Meanwhile we have to remember that, things being as they are, the only way open to us of coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty, of fulfilling our pledges, and of protecting whole nations that are threatened with extinction or slavery, was and is the way of war. The power that God has given us is not in itself an evil thing. And solemn as the responsibility is, we have to show that in a righteous cause we do not wear the sword in vain. The use of force in a righteous war is on exactly the same footing as the use of force in our judicial system.* And it is well to remind ourselves that a man survives the death of his body. There are worse things than being killed or wounded, or even than killing and wounding others in answer to the call of duty.

Of course, if our cause is not righteous, we must expect to fail; but of that God is the Judge, and we can only commit ourselves and our cause without

* See Westcott, *Lessons from Work*; p. 360

reserve into His hands, and pray for the triumph of His perfect, just, and loving will.

YET IT IS WORTH WHILE TO PRAY

There is no way like that for purging our motives from any stain of faithlessness or self-will, and for keeping them pure. There is no way like that for keeping our heads clear, our wills firm, and our spirits free from bitterness and the passion of revenge. Such a prayer involves no self-righteous judging. It is rooted in the conviction that God is Judge, and that because He is God, He has ways open to Him which are not open to us of seeing that justice is done all round. It is a perpetual reminder to us that God is not an indifferent spectator of all that is going on in the world, but that

Right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win.
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

When we shut our eyes to this truth the brightness of life is lost past recall. There is nothing for it but to hold on, as if life were a matter of sheer endurance, and the best that we can hope for is just not to give in.

Now no doubt there are times when life looks like this, but to regard this view of life as going to the root of the matter, to imagine that "stalemate" is the only possible issue in the age-long struggle between good and evil, whether in individual or national life, is in the last degree depressing and enfeebling. It is fundamentally false, for it leaves out of account the most important factor in the situation, God Himself. It makes what has been the measure of what can be. It condemns us to the hopeless mediocrity of an "average standard," and so

reduces our efficiency, and, worse than that, it limits God. For God can only give in proportion to our faith, and faith is weak whenever hope is dim.

THE EFFECT OF PUTTING ON THE HELMET

On the other hand, the man who, to use a figure of Emerson's, "hitches his cart on to a star," who grasps the hand of God, lifts up his head and walks with a spring. He goes forward with a contagious enthusiasm as the member of "the ever-victorious army." He is not afraid, as the great pioneer missionary, the Baptist cobbler Carey, has taught us, "to attempt great things for God," because "he expects great things from God."

It is difficult not to believe, when we think of the opportunities and needs of the present situation both at home and abroad, that the part of the Christian armour that we have most need of at the present time is just this helmet of salvation—or, rather, a new vision of all the infinite resources that are waiting for us in God. For only that vision can be in us an inexhaustible fountain of hope, and enable us, in spite of our dull imaginations and our little faith, to receive that helmet from the Hand of God and to put it on.

X

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD

“The sword of the spirit which is the word of God.”

EPHESIANS vi. 17.

WE come in this study to the last element in the equipment of the Christian soldier: “The Sword of the Spirit which is the word”—or, more strictly, “an utterance”—“of God.” It is, with the partial exception of the helmet, our one weapon of offence. Without it we may indeed be able to ward off any blows aimed against us by our enemies, but we shall be powerless to put them to flight, or to take an active share in winning the battle for our Lord.

It would be interesting, if space permitted, to work out the place of the Sword in Knightly Armour and to illustrate the importance attaching in national folk-lore to the swords of great heroes: to the sword of Siegfried and our own King Arthur’s mighty brand Excalibur. It would be still more to our purpose to meditate on the Sword of the Son of Man, the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord, which St. John saw at the beginning (Rev. i. 16) and near the end (xix. 15) of his Revelation. For that sword is in a true sense the same in kind that we have to wield. St. John represents it, caring more for the meaning than for the picture called up by his description, as proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord, so intent

is he on making us realize the mighty power of the words that come from his Master's lips. For St. Paul is not thinking in the first instance, as we generally take for granted, of the Bible as the Sword of a Christian, though we shall have to consider before we have done how the Bible can help a man to forge his own sword and train him to wield it. He is thinking not of words written in a book, but of words such as those which God put directly into the mouths of the prophets in the Old Testament. His words recall passages like the picture of the Servant of the Lord in Is. xlix. 2 : "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword," and of the Son of David in Is. xi. 4 : "With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

THE POWER OF A TRUE WORD

This seems, no doubt, strange language to us. Words seem such powerless, light and transitory things. Our words are so often idle, meaningless, or worse, false, treacherous, slanderous. It is hard to think of them as our one weapon in our Christian warfare, the one means which we have for "putting to flight the armies of the aliens," or to change our metaphor, for building up the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

Yet so it is. The strongholds of Satan, all the terrible vested interests behind which our natural vices are entrenched, all the sins, that by force of habit beset us and seem to make it impossible for us ever to break free, are buttressed with lies. The one thing against which in the end they cannot stand is the light

of God's presence. They are powerless when confronted with a word of Truth.

Whoever seemed so impotent as Jesus of Nazareth, standing bound before the Roman Governor, challenged to say whether or no He was a King ? and saying simply, " For this cause have I been born, and for this end have I come into the world that I should bear witness to the Truth. Everyone who is of the Truth heareth My voice " ? What did it matter that they crucified Him with this accusation over His head : " This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews " ? His word was true, and it has made the Cross His Throne, from which He reigns over the hearts of all men who are of the Truth everywhere. And He must reign, as St. Paul tells us, until God has put all His enemies under His feet.

Surely the word of Truth is mighty. And the injunction " to receive the Sword of the Spirit " is a reminder to each of us that in our Confirmation we were made not kings and priests only but prophets also to God, capable of knowing His will and hearing His word, and, as occasion arises, of speaking it out for Him—a word, which will not return unto Him void, but will prosper in the thing whereto He sends it, whether to pull down the evil or to plant and build up the good.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO SPEAK SUCH WORDS?

If a " word from God " is the Sword we have to use, what, we must go on to ask, is required on our side that we may have it ready to hand in the hour of need ? Is it not insight into the mind and will of God ?

The power to see the truth of any matter, as He

sees it, lies at the root of the power of applying it by giving it articulate expression, and so, to use another phrase of St. Paul, " by the manifestation of the truth " to commend ourselves and our message to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

How, then, can we hope to attain to this insight ? The answer is nearer to hand than we had imagined. Our whole study of the Christian Armour has been preparing us for it. Insight into the mind and will of God can only be the fruit of a life lived close to God, but what is that but the life of a man clad in the armour that we have been considering together piece by piece ? Can anything bring a man and keep a man nearer to God than to live with his loins girded with truth, keeping his conscience void of offence towards God and man, and so wearing the breast-plate of righteousness, with his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, because he is always on the watch for an opportunity of helping a brother or a sister to come back to God, grasping firmly the shield of faith, because he knows Whom he has believed, and wearing the helmet of salvation in the assurance that he is called to be an instrument in God's hand for the triumph of His cause ? A man clad in this armour would, we may well believe, never be left without the guidance of the Holy Spirit when and what to speak. He would never be forced to give ground for lack of munitions.

THE BIBLE OUR TRAINING SCHOOL

At the same time, both the faculty of insight into the mind and will of God and the power of expression need development and training. In some of the old legends, to which I referred at the beginning of this study, stress is laid on the fact that the hero, before

he can appear in public as a deliverer, must forge his own sword.

This is pre-eminently true of anyone who aspires to be a spiritual hero and to work the deliverance of God on the earth. In great measure, as I have already indicated, this forging is done as we don the rest of our armour. But it is also worth noticing that, as St. Paul taught Timothy, one main function of the Bible (2 Tim. iii. 15) is to make us "wise unto salvation," and that is not to be limited to the securing of our own personal safety ; its manifold operations are directed to making "the man of God ready, fully equipped for every good work." One main reason why the Bible is put into his hands is that the study of it may help him to forge his own "Sword of the Spirit" by quickening his faculty of spiritual insight and training his power of expression.

For what, after all, is the Bible ? It is the record of the experience of faithful soldiers and servants of God in the days that are past. Its words are the words of men whose eyes were opened to see the will and purpose of God for their own day and generation and to express what they saw. And words, given in the first instance by the inspiration of God, have in them light for all time. The hearts of men in all ages have responded to them. We know for ourselves that they are not dead letters, but, as St. Stephen called even the Ten Commandments, "living oracles," abiding revelations of God's will and of the method of His government of men ; solemn warnings of possibilities of failure, or stimulating examples of the triumphs of faith.

THE BIBLE IN THE LIFE OF OUR LORD

It was in this way that our Lord Himself, in His conflict with the Tempter in the wilderness, used the

Bible to foil all his attacks. Each suggestion of the Tempter as it came, however seemingly innocent, was brought to the touchstone of the written word, and the evil in it laid bare : " It is written, ' Man shall not live by bread alone.' " " It is written, ' Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' " " It is written, ' Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.' "

It is clear that in His quiet waiting time in the thirty years that He spent in the carpenter's home in Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of God had not disdained the help of His Bible in forging the Sword that He was to wield in His solitary conflict, and in His public teaching.

In this as in so many other ways He has given us an example that we should follow in His steps. If even He did not disdain the light on His path that came from the study of the Bible, we know that we cannot dispense with it.

Even though, as I have said, the utterance of God, which is to be our sword in each crisis, is the word which the Spirit there and then puts into our mouth, yet no one can hope to wield that Sword of the Spirit effectively, or be fitly furnished for every good word and work, who neglects to read his Bible, and to master its lessons by moulding his own life in accordance with them.

XI

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

“Watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”—EPHESIANS vi. 18.

THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER THE MEMBER OF AN ARMY

WE have completed our study of the Christian Armour piece by piece as St. Paul brings it before us in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It only remains for us to consider the importance for each soldier of keeping clear and bright in his remembrance the thought of the mighty army to which he belongs. The Christian has indeed what often seems a solitary battle to fight. It looks as if he were left to his own resources to defend some solitary outpost or to scout ahead of his company in the dark. But that is never the true account of the matter. He is never really out of touch with his regiment, or with his Commander in-Chief. The position given to him to hold has a place in a world-wide plan. So his faithfulness to his task always affects others beside himself, even when he seems to be engaged in a humiliating, almost desperate, fight against a secret personal besetting sin. And the force of the whole army is behind him at every moment. It is always true of him, as it was of Elisha and his young servant in Dothan (2 Kings vi. 16), though the whole host of the Syrians had come out to effect their capture, “They that be with us are more than they that be with them.” It is most

important, therefore, to remind ourselves, before we close, of the different elements that go to make up the fighting value of faith in the Communion of Saints.

THE UNITY OF CHRISTENDOM AND THE EUROPEAN WAR

This communion or fellowship is, of course, one and indivisible. It is the fellowship of the One Holy Spirit, by Whom we are all baptized into the One Body, and Who makes us and keeps us all, however outwardly divided, one living whole in Christ Jesus our Lord. So that we cannot be independent of one another even if we would. If one member of the body suffer, the vitality of the whole is lowered. All the members suffer with it. The schisms which divide East and West, Roman and Anglican and Nonconformist, make us, as we know now to our shame, miserably ineffective in our witness to Christ both in the world at large and at home in England. How can a Church divided against itself bring the peace of Christ to bear as arbiter in international complications abroad, or in social and political controversies at home? But this only proves that by God's appointment we are necessary to one another, and are condemned to powerlessness, as long as we are content to remain split up into rival camps. Is it too much to hope that one result of the tragic failure of a divided Christendom to avert this European war may be to send us to our knees to confess, not merely the misery, but the sin of our "unhappy divisions," and to pray God to restore the visible unity, which His sore judgments are teaching us to realize to be according to His Will?

This may well seem the vision of a land that is very far off, and no doubt we, who are only privates in the

Christian Army, must leave the steps that are necessary for the restoration of visible unity to Christendom in the hands of our superior officers. Still it is good to be reminded that we all have a direct interest in that restoration, and ought never to cease to pray for it. For our objective is the salvation of the world, and the whole Church must work together before it can hope to win the whole world for Christ.

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND THE NATIONAL MISSION

Even if we think only of the task of winning England, to which the National Mission called the National Church, our minds must turn to the problem of Home Reunion. For we cannot reach our goal without the co-operation of "all who are called to be saints" among us. And the solution of that problem is, alas ! not yet in sight.

Still, even in the first stage of the Mission, the effort to do the work committed to us and to give a call from God to the nation, parish by parish, and diocese by diocese, had one most hopeful result. It quickened in us the sense of our need, one of another, within our own Communion. It taught us the reality of the bond that unites those who feed on the One Bread and drink of the One Cup. It opened our eyes to the possibilities of corporate witness for Christ that are open to us as soon as we come together in His Name for common counsel and common action for the advancement of His Kingdom. It taught us how far-reaching are the issues which depend on our realization of these possibilities.

The Church of Christ is set in each parish to be the home and school of the spirit of brotherhood. God grant that we are all a little nearer to the understanding

of this fundamental fact. If we are to help Englishmen to dwell together in unity we must show them that it is possible by doing it before their eyes as Churchmen.

These considerations may help us to understand the fighting value of the Communion of Saints for the work that is laid upon us as a body to reveal the Presence of Christ to those who know Him not, and to bring His Spirit to bear on the conversion of the nation to which we belong. I have already hinted at the strength, which comes to each of us in our individual battle, to learn that even that has its place in the whole campaign, and that all our brothers have a direct interest in our personal success or failure. It is good, even though it is bitter, to be reminded that we sin not only against God but against the Church whenever we fall. 1

THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH MILITANT WITH THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT

So far we have been dealing only with that part of the Communion of Saints which is still visibly militant here on earth. But that we must remember is, after all, but a small part of the whole Communion. If even our sins and our selfishness, and everything else that hinders godly union and concord between us, has no power to destroy the bond by which we are united now, still less has death any power to divide us from those who have passed within the veil.

We are not told much of the conditions of life beyond the grave. It may well be that we have not the faculties which would enable us to understand them if they were revealed. We must be content to know that He Who is the First and the Last and the Living One—Who became dead and is alive for ever—

more—has the keys of Death and the Grave (Revelation i. 18) : and that death is now only the gateway into closer fellowship with Him, where those that die in the Lord rest from their toiling, but the faculties trained and consecrated to His service in this life are not destroyed or left to rust unused, for " their works follow with them " (Revelation xiv. 13) : and when the seer's eyes are opened to see Him coming forth to do battle for His Church on earth, the armies that are in heaven follow Him arrayed in the raiment of the Bride of the Lamb (Revelation xix. 14).

THE INSPIRATION OF THE COMMUNION

Do we really need a fuller or more satisfying revelation than this? It is one thing to know, as Elisha knew, the protecting presence of the holy angels, the ministering spirits that, no doubt, under the New Dispensation as under the Old, are sent out to do service for the heirs of salvation (Hebrews i. 14). But they belong to another order of being, and it does not seem as if the perfection of sympathy was possible between us and them. On the other hand, the spirits of just men made perfect, the heroes of faith in former generations, are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh ; and the assurance that they are interested spectators of our struggles which is given us by Hebrews xii. 1, 23, and yet more, that they are marshalled in battle array under our Lord Himself to fight on our behalf, must be a continual inspiration to anyone who will give the thought room to exert its legitimate influence over him.

The chosen three were allowed on the Mount of Transfiguration to see that this communion played a real part in preparing our Lord Himself for the decease that He had to accomplish at Jerusalem

(St. Luke ix. 31). And an angel who describes himself as a fellow-servant of the prophets was sent to St. John in the Island of Patmos to interpret his vision.

There is a danger, of course, of which St. John himself was conscious and against which he was expressly warned, of gratitude for services rendered passing into the worship due to God alone (Revelation xix. 10; xxii. 9). But the very danger is a proof of the reality of the relationship that exists between the members of the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, and it is difficult to estimate the impoverishment of our lives which comes from our ingrained reluctance to open our hearts to the devout contemplation of this aspect of the Communion of Saints.

HOW WE MAY SAFELY OPEN OUR HEARTS TO THIS COMMUNION

It is to this cause, I think, more than to any other, that we must ascribe our failure to recognize the completeness of the triumph which our Lord has won for us over death, and the eagerness with which men clutch at any plank, however frail, which offers any prospect of bridging the gulf which separates us from those within the veil.

Our Church is, no doubt, quite rightly jealous of any return to such practice of the Invocation of Saints, as was deliberately discarded at the Reformation, but as long as we retain in our Prayer Books the Te Deum and the invitation to Communicants to join with "the whole company of heaven" in magnifying the glorious Name, there can be no objection in principle to restoring the Commemoration of Saints by name, which is a feature of all primitive liturgies, and which passed from them into the first reformed Prayer Book in 1549.

Such a commemoration would be a hint to each of us to keep continually alive in our hearts the feeling of gratitude to God for the holy men and women of our own and former generations, through whom we personally are conscious of having been brought to know Him better, and so to keep open channels by which they, being not dead but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord, may still speak to us, and exert an ever-growing and deepening influence over our hearts and lives.

It is difficult to overestimate the fighting value of the fresh store of courage, endurance, and wisdom which is thus brought within our reach. And, indeed, we need not fear lest the influence of the blessed spirits, whose glory is to witness to us of the all-sufficient grace of their Lord and ours, should in any way endanger our loyalty to Him. It may well be that it is only through them that our eyes can be opened to understand the direct share that He Himself is taking in the battle on our behalf.

XII

PRAYER

"With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit."—EPHESIANS vi. 18.

THE CALL TO PUT ON CHRIST

LET us begin our closing study by casting a glance over the ground we have travelled together. We examined first the nature of the conflict to which as soldiers of Christ we are committed. It is a spiritual conflict, and must be waged with spiritual weapons. The only thing that counts in it is character. So we were prepared to understand that "the armour of God," the equipment that he provides for His soldiers, is the character of Christ.

This does not, we must remember, mean that Jesus Christ is put before us simply for imitation as a model of perfect humanity. If that were all, beautiful and instructive as His example is, it would drive us to despair. It is altogether out of our power to reproduce it. It means that Christ will transform from within after His own likeness any man who will surrender himself to be moulded by His Spirit. It is that surrender to which St. Paul calls us in the Epistle for Advent Sunday (Rom. xiii. 14) when he bids us "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." He would have us know for ourselves what it means to say "I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

In the passage we have been studying (Eph. vi.

10-20) St. Paul has been applying the thought of " putting on Christ " to the practical needs of Christian life regarded as a direct and personal struggle against spiritual foes. He directed our thoughts first to three intimate personal qualities : " Truth " or " Sincerity," including faithfulness to our professions and promises ; then " Righteousness," a conscience void of offence towards God and man ; then " Zeal for the spread of the glad tidings we have received." These three secure efficiency, courage and initiative for the man who develops them. They were all embodied in Christ, and are characteristic of His Spirit. Whatever our natural disabilities, they will pass from Him to us as we live in communion with Him.

St. Paul then lifted our thoughts from ourselves to God. He made us find Shield, Helmet and Sword in different aspects of the revelation of God given us in Christ. Our Shield is the revelation of the Nature and the Name of God, which is the ground of a Faith which the utmost malice of our foe is unable to disturb. Our Helmet is the confidence which comes from the vision of the Will and Power of God to deliver man, which sends us out " conquering and meaning to conquer." The word which He will put on our lips in the crisis of the struggle is " the Sword " of His Spirit, whereby we can triumph over all the powers of darkness that are arrayed against us.

ST. PAUL'S HINTS ON PRAYER

Our power to appropriate the last two of these pieces of our Armour is directly connected by St. Paul with the practice of prayer. " Receive from God's Hand," he says, " the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit . . . *with all prayer and sup-*

lication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Now prayer is no doubt especially necessary if we are to keep printed in our remembrance our relation to the onward march of God's Will to victory, and to receive from Him "words that are very swords," but the Christian Armour is, as we have seen, a living whole, and we shall not do wrong to devote our closing study to this instruction on prayer in the conviction that it will show us how to make our own not only our helmet and our sword, but also all the other elements in the Panoply of God.

Let us notice first the twofold character of the exercise which St. Paul recommends. He calls us to prayer and to supplication. Prayer is the most general word for describing the lifting up of the heart to God, the effort to come into His presence and seek Communion with Him. It is of the utmost importance to keep this aspect of the task, to which we are called, in the forefront. It is so hard in the hour of our extremity not to let the specific need that sends us to our knees fill our whole horizon and shut out the face of Him to Whom we pray. And yet believing and prevailing prayer springs, and can only spring, from the thought that God knows what things we have need of before we ask Him, and is not taken by surprise by the crisis that seems to us overwhelming (St. Matthew vi. 8).

At the same time for the matter in hand, for the acquisition of a specific Christian character,* there is need of definite "supplication": of prayer, that

* Anyone who wishes for practical guidance on this head should refer to a little book, dear to St. Francis of Sales, *The Spiritual Combat*, Laurence Scupoli, easily accessible in English in various forms.

is, concentrated on a particular object; of effort deliberate and sustained to win from God the particular grace that we desire for ourselves, or the particular blessing that we would win for our neighbour.

We must pass on to consider the special characteristics both of prayer and supplication on which St. Paul fixes our attention. He would have us pray "at all seasons." The recognition of the Divine Presence should be habitual, expressing the whole tone and temper of our life, and not an occasional interlude. Its outward expression should be not formal and mechanical, but "in spirit," an exercise of our inmost being energized and uplifted by the Spirit of God.

This habit is not to be acquired without doing some measure of violence to ourselves. We must "watch," keep awake while others sleep, with a view to it. Our "perseverance" will be tested by apparent delay in the granting of our petitions, and by seasons of dryness, when the whole exercise seems utterly distasteful.

Lastly, he would have us keep alive and active in our hearts the *esprit de corps* of the Army of God by including "the whole Communion of Saints" in the circle of our intercession.

PRAYER AS OUR BATTLEFIELD AND TRAINING GROUND

It may seem to some at first sight strange to find the thought of prayer introduced into so warlike a passage. Praying looked at from the outside seems such a simple matter. What can be more natural than for a child to draw near to his Father in heaven? Where are we to find peace if not in His presence chamber?

Yet, as St. Paul reminded us (verse 12), it is just "in the heavenlies" that we have to meet our foes, and it is a significant fact that his references to prayer speak of it again as a "strife" or "contest" (Colossians ii. 1; iv. 12; Romans xv. 30).

There are indeed more ways than one in which this "contest" may be regarded. We may picture prayer to ourselves, as it is pictured in the story of Jacob's wrestling (Genesis xxxii.), as a friendly trial of strength with God.

From another side, we have to bring our unruly passions and appetites, our bad habits and low desires into the presence of God in prayer, as General Gordon used to do, and slay the evil there.

Yet again, temptations coming from without must be met by keeping a careful watch for the signs of the approach of our foe. And prayer then becomes, as it became in Gethsemane, "a fight for power to see and courage to do the will of God." We have no cause, therefore, to regard a reference to prayer as out of place in an instruction on Christian Armour. That armour, as we have seen, is character. And to quote a writer * to whom I owe many of the thoughts in this paragraph, "Prayer is the innermost form of the fight for character."

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN CHARACTER-BUILDING

Prayer, however, is not all fighting, and there is another aspect of it which is even more in place here. Characters must no doubt be built up line upon line by resolute striving after an ideal. But it is even more important to remember that "character is caught by personal association." And the character of Christ

* H. E. Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer*.

can only be caught by communion with Him. It is only as "with unveiled face we gaze on and reflect the glory of the Lord" that "we are transformed into His likeness from glory to glory as by a sovereign Spirit" (2 Corinthians iii. 18).

We may well, therefore, be grateful to St. Paul for his closing exhortation, guiding and guarding the efforts that we have to put forth when we come to pray.

It is not enough to read about the different parts of our Armour, and to understand their working. We must lay hold of them one by one and make them our own. And we have to do this in the presence of our foe. Like so many of our citizen soldiers during this war, we have to get our training "at the front." It is, therefore, good to be reminded that what is required of us is just this, to learn to pray. Prayer is the battlefield where we can meet and unmask our foe. Prayer is the training ground for the development of our fighting capacity. Prayer is the base from whence we draw our supplies.

We shall be prepared, therefore, to take pains to learn to pray. We shall realize that the habit of prayer cannot be formed or maintained without sustained effort, the deliberate setting apart of stated times, and the curtailment, if necessary, of accustomed hours of rest.

We shall be careful to "set the Lord always before us" when we come to pray, yielding ourselves to the uplifting and sustaining power of His Spirit, and guarding jealously against the danger of letting the thought of our need come between us and Him.

At the same time we shall remember the importance of definiteness in our petitions. We shall concentrate our attention on one point after another in the character that we have to acquire. And, however

sorely our patience and perseverance may be tried, we shall never by God's grace relax our efforts till our goal is won.

Lastly, we shall never forget, even in praying most earnestly for our own perfecting, that we are members of an army, every member of which has a claim on our intercessions. Indeed, we shall find again and again that we can pray for others when we have no heart to pray for ourselves, and our prayer will return with abundant blessing into our own bosom. The LORD turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends (Job xlvi. 10).

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